

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

February 6, 1968

Area Code 415

321-1200

Mrs. Katherine B. Oettinger
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Population and Family Planning
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Washington, D. C. 20201

Dear Mrs. Oettinger:

I am writing this note as a companion to my other letter of the same date, since I am signing it in a somewhat different capacity. For some time Professor Walter Bodmer of this department and I have sustained a definite interest in population studies from a genetic standpoint. I would have to say that these studies do not command the first priority of our attention, since we have commitments to experimental research in a number of other directions. Nevertheless, we have been most eager to establish a program for training of Ph.D. candidates in population genetics, and we feel that we also have a number of unique resources by way of computer facilities and our own experience in handling them that would be very germane to this field. Finally, Dr. Bodmer's outstanding position as a biometrician and the very fact that our principal scientific experience is in the laboratory lend a unique quality to our approach.

I have to admit that one of these qualities was, at the start of our studies, unwarranted optimism as to the reliability of the data that have been accumulated for census purposes. Nevertheless, we feel that these files still contain an immense amount of useful information for population studies and it is tragic waste of the investment made so far that they are not more readily and generally available to research students. Furthermore, they are an excellent object file for developing a new kind of methodology based on time-shared computing for the handling of this large bulk of statistical information. By no means the smallest innovation in our system has been the cooperation we have been able to work out with the Bureau of the Census that satisfies our research needs on one hand, and the legal requirements for confidentiality on the other.

At any rate, we now have a laboriously constructed, compacted file of the 5% sample of the United States population census for 1960. The great bulk of the work has already been done in preparing this file, and in producing the Census Bureau's report on child-spacing, which should be in production now or very shortly. If we could obtain further financial support, we would like to continue our studies on the variance of fertility and its categorization

for different segments of the population. We were not, in good conscience, able to defend this project for a high priority rating purely on its research merits. When the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development faced a severe stringency of funds during the last couple of years, we ourselves agreed that the project should give way to more pressing requirements for laboratory research. However, this evaluation gives very little weight to the other merits of the project, especially its utility in providing a more accessible data base, for example, for your bureau, and for the research interests of other investigators in demography. I have been able to arrange a small grant from the Syntex Laboratories, Inc. to tide us over to the completion of our project to the stage of the preparation of the child-spacing report. However, if we do not obtain other funding we will have to disband the small team of assistants working with us in programming and in the statistical compilations, and I doubt that we will be in a position to start up this line of work in the future if that is the case.

I am writing now, then, to inquire whether your bureau has the interest and the resources to help us maintain this project. A two or three year program funded at a level of \$25,000 per year in direct costs would be about the minimum worth considering, and this would be based on the somewhat uncertain possibility that the Census Bureau will continue to provide a part-time salary from its own funds without re-billing us for it. Since the attitude of the Census Bureau is of some importance in delineating the project, I might suggest that you make direct contact with Mr. Jack Beresford of the Population Division to ascertain its current status.

It is, of course, characteristic of any investigation that the really interesting questions come up only during the pursuit of stated objectives. There is one subject about which you might have established an independent interest, and on which I have not been able to find any published information. I was provoked by some comment that prematurity rates had actually decreased in the United States during World War II to look at some aspects of differential fertility during that period. There were, of course, very sharp fluctuations in over-all natality, but I have not been able to find much information on class specific differentials. There are, however, some census tabulations of age in 1960 by race which must reflect mainly the natality trends, although influenced to a modest extent by postnatal losses and shifts in the populations. I am enclosing a short summary indicating the white/non-white ratios for those years, and on the face of it the figures are already rather provocative. This raises for me the general question of the differential impact of the war on class fertility, a question that could be explored to a considerable extent with the census data. Obviously, it would be much better to have such information from natality statistics, but they simply do not exist with sufficient background information for that period.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

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